

The Strategic Role of Parents in Optimizing Character Education in Early Childhood in the Family Environment

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Abstract

So far, the role of parents in educating the character of their young children in the family environment has not run optimally. Whereas parents have an important role in shaping children's character. The purpose of this research was to determine the strategic role of parents in optimizing character education in early childhood in the family environment. The method used in this research was descriptive qualitative. The sampling technique used in this research is snowball sampling. Data collection techniques used were observation, interviews and documentation (triangulation). The data analysis used was the Miles and Huberman model. The results of this research indicated that the role of parents in optimizing character education in early childhood is carried out by example, providing free time, advice, motivation, habituation and punishment. But not all families implement this role in optimizing their children's character education. From the 10 families studied, it was found that 10 families applied the role of parents by exemplary, 6 families provided leisure time, 8 families received advice, 7 families by motivation, 10 families had habituation and 10 families by punishment. This research needs to be expanded and deepened again by adding sample.

Keywords: *early childhood; character education; the role of parents.*

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Introduction

Although it has been more than six years since the Presidential Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 87 of 2017 concerning the Implementation of Character Education was enacted, it seems that character education in Indonesia has not been optimal. Given that various multidimensional problems continue to hit this nation relentlessly. Starting from KKN (Corruption, Collusion and Nepotism), separatism (KKB), terrorism, free sex, violence, brawls between students (Purnomo, 2014) in his research stated that the perpetrators of immoral acts came from among students, ranging from the habit of cheating which has now

become a culture, drinking / alcoholic beverages, smoking in the school environment, drugs, promiscuity and free sex, brawls between students to the circulation of pornographic videos among students..

Behavior lacking character is not only shown by adults and adolescents, but these symptoms also appear in early childhood. Based on the results of the researcher's initial observations of 10 families spread across Blahkiuh Village, Abiansema District, Badung Regency, found a number of behaviors that indicate moral or character degradation in early childhood, such as saying disrespectfully to the interlocutor, be it friends or elders, getting angry for no apparent reason, littering, like lie, act rudely to siblings or friends (bullying), often violate existing rules, and go against parental orders.

This deviant behavior proves that the character of the Indonesian nation has been torn apart by a multidimensional crisis. According to (Hadisi, 2015) the occurrence of inequality which is evidence that there has been a crisis of identity and characteristics in the Indonesian nation. It can be said, the Indonesian nation in the current situation is experiencing moral decadence. Moral decadence as a result of cultural liberation has actually hit society (Indonesia). The negative impact of globalization has also contributed to the distance from habitual patterns, behavior and association of the community (students) contrary to religious, social and national character norms (Sumadi, 2018).

This condition raises awareness of how urgent the agenda is to make a breakthrough in order to shape and foster character for the nation's generation. The urgency of character education is developed because one of the areas of national development that is very important and becomes the foundation of social, national and state life is the development of national character (Nurdin, 2010). To further strengthen its implementation, character education should begin in early childhood (Mei-Ju et al., 2014). According to research (Priska, 2020), that early childhood is a time when the physical, mental and spiritual development of children will begin to form. Because of this, many call this period the golden age of children. Based on research conducted by (Wawan, 2020) on 30 families related to the influence of the role of parents to shape children's character in three provinces, Bali, NTB, and NTT, the results show that 70% of parents have a decisive role in shaping children's character.

The reason for instilling character from an early age is clearly well received by children. Because at an early age the child's brain develops very quickly up to 80 percent (Bruer, 1999). Remembering that early childhood brains can receive and absorb a variety of information, regardless of the good and bad content. Early age is a phase of life where individuals experience a significant increase in their development. Early childhood development includes various aspects of development, namely: religious and moral values, social emotional, cognitive, language, physical motor, and art (Khaironi, 2017).

Unfortunately, there has been a fundamental misunderstanding of the implementation of character education in early childhood. Some people accuse schools of failing to build character in children (Birhan et al., 2021). Often teachers and school institutions become targets to be blamed every time a case occurs that befalls students (Berkowitz & Hoppe, 2009). The assessment started from simply highlighting the teacher's lack of seriousness in educating and the teacher's exemplary crisis, questioning the curriculum, to questioning whether or not character education was revived or adding to the number of religious lessons in addition to Pancasila Education lessons which were increasingly losing their orientation. So far, the misunderstanding of the responsibilities of formal school institutions in character education has unknowingly reduced the role of parents in educating their children (Hargreaves, 2001). That's what makes parents no longer care about the character education of their children. Character education that takes place in the family does not run optimally.

Even if you want to assess it objectively, the school is not the only institution that should be responsible for the formation of children's character. As regulated in Presidential Regulation No. 87 of 2017 concerning Strengthening Character Education, it is stated, that the implementation of character education is not only carried out through formal and non-formal

education but also informal (Ismail et al., 2021). The household or family as an informal education unit, as well as the smallest unit of character formation in society must be optimally empowered. Given that character education in the family environment determines the success of schools in educating children's character. This success is inseparable from the family environment which is the first and foremost environment in the formation of children's character (Karo Karo, 2019).

This is in accordance with the opinion (Setiardi, 2017), that character education must first be carried out in the family environment, because the family is the main and first source for children to acquire, shape and develop character. This is in accordance with the opinion (Marui, 2016), that lifelong education in a family starts from the first days of a child's life. Character education is more effective in the family, because most of the child's time is spent at home. This is where character education in the family has a strategic role in supporting schools to educate children's character from an early age. Moreover, the development of character education in schools is an integral part of the school's efforts to fulfill all the expectations of parents to build and form children with good character (Smetana, 1999).

The question arises who plays a role in the family in educating children's character from an early age? What roles are played in optimizing character education in early childhood? When viewed from the family structure, parents should play a role in optimizing early childhood education in the family. Several previous studies have proven the importance of the role of parents in shaping children's character, such as research conducted by (Hanina et al., 2020), (Widianto, 2015), (Jannah & Umam, 2021), and (Pratiwi, 2019). In general, the research conducted has been able to show how the role of parents in educating their children's character (Paul et al., 2022).

This research has a significant difference with previous studies. This research intends to lay down a general principle for families, especially parents in playing their role in educating their children to have good character or noble character. Not only that, the role of parents in this research has special characteristics with the aim of optimizing the implementation of character education in early childhood in the family environment. Through this research, researchers hope to explore and discover the role that parents should play in educating early childhood in the family environment.

Methodology

The method used in this research was descriptive qualitative. This research activity was carried out in Blahkiuh Village, Abiansemal District, Badung Regency, Bali Province. In this research the intended subjects were 10 families with 10 fathers and 10 mothers. The basis for determining the sample was based on the consideration that these families were considered the most representative in this study. The sampling technique used in this research is snowball sampling. The research instrument with this qualitative method was self-research (human instrument). It is assumed that data and information can be rationally accounted for, because researchers themselves are trying to adapt to sources of information both physically and psychologically (Suris et al., 2004).

For data collection techniques in qualitative research generally consists of four types, namely observation, interviews, documentation, and combination or triangulation. In this research, the data collection technique used was a combination or triangulation. The triangulation technique was carried out by means of method triangulation, namely by re-checking the information from the interviews with documentation and observation (Wulandari & Kristiawan, 2017). Observations were made to see directly what role parents play in optimizing children's character education at an early age. In order for the observations that the researchers made to be objective, when they entered the field the researchers were equipped with observation guidelines (Jordensa et al., 2019).

In an effort to dig up more extensive and in-depth information, the researchers conducted interviews with research subjects. Questions were asked verbally about their role as parents in optimizing character education for their children. To complete data collection, researchers used documentation techniques by collecting and analyzing documents, both written documents, images and electronics.

Data obtained from the field from respondents either through observation, interviews or documentation studies are descriptive data about opinions, knowledge, experience and other aspects to be analyzed and presented so that they have meaning. Data analysis was carried out to organize, sort, classify, code/mark, and categorize them, so that a finding is obtained based on the focus or problem to be answered in this research. In this research, the data analysis used was the Miles and Huberman model, (Nur & Malli, 2022) that is carried out interactively and takes place continuously until complete. Therefore in qualitative research, the data obtained was analyzed by the following steps: analyzing data in the field that was done during data collection; going on; analyze data that has been collected or data that has just been obtained. Data analysis consists of three streams of activities that occur simultaneously, namely: data reduction, data presentation, drawing conclusions/verification.

As long as the data collection process is complete, the researchers made a research report using a descriptive method, which is a type of research that aims to make a picture of situations or events. In more detail, the exposure to the research flow can be seen in Figure 1.

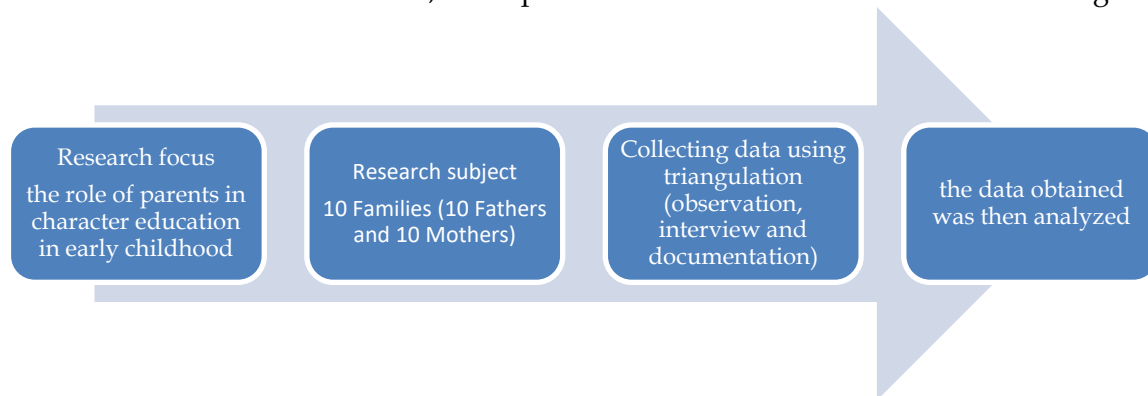


Figure 1. Research Flow

Result and Discussion

Based on the interviews that the researchers conducted, it can be found that the role of parents in optimizing character education in early childhood is carried out by example, providing leisure time, advice, motivation, habituation and punishment. However, based on the observations of researchers, it turns out that not all families implement this role in optimizing their children's character education. Through this bar chart (Figure 2), it can be explained in more detail the role of parents and families who apply it.

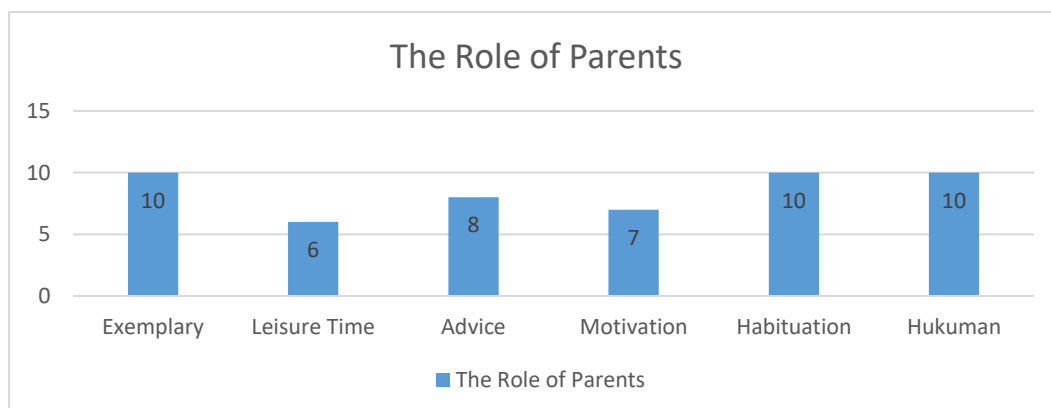


Figure 2. diagram of interview results with parents

Exemplary is the most widely used method. Even of the 10 families used as subjects in this research, all of them have used exemplary in optimizing their children's character education. Based on the results of interviews conducted with parents, it was found that they preferred to educate their children's character by exemplary. Parents have the view that such a small child (at an early age) certainly cannot do many things. Given the age of 0-6 years, so many limitations. Social environment is very limited, that is only at home. So the closest are us as the parents. Often we see children love to imitate what we do. Just a small example when we speak polite language, then the children also imitate it in communicating.

The tendency of early childhood to imitate other people, especially parents, can be seen from research results (Nasiruddin, 2022), because for children who are still in the imitating stage, they are not yet able to judge and filter out what is good and what is bad. So whatever children listen and look from their parents, good or bad, they will also imitate and practice it. When children listen dirty words, they will also say these sentences when talking to other people. According to research (Berkowis & Bier, 2006), that in terms of actions will also be exemplified as they are, regardless of whether the action is good or bad. This habit of imitating children will be the basis for forming children's character in the future, especially when they are adults.

From the results of the interview above, it can also be seen that parents are already aware of their behavior which is often imitated by their children. This will make parents to always be careful in behaving in front of their children. In practice, parents are the first and foremost teachers for their children at home. In this situation, the family is an important axis in the process of forming a child's character. Because the habits that are witnessed, experienced by a child from his parents will be directly or indirectly recorded in the mind, it is even likely that the children will follow or imitate them at home (Davies et al., 2005).

Parental example that is applied consistently in the family can provide good direction to help children control themselves, have responsibility, and be wise in behaving and acting according to the rules, so that children have good character. Based on research results from (Kusdani, 2022) Exemplary in education is an influential and proven method of preparing and shaping the moral, spiritual and social ethos of children. Basically, humans tend to need role models who are able to direct people to the path of truth.

Based on the results of interviews and field observations, the example set by parents in optimizing character education for their children at an early age is by prioritizing good manners in behaving and acting, saying greetings when leaving and coming home, praying before doing activities (eating and sleeping), never fight in front of children, love fellow family members, wake up on time, clean the home environment and greet each other.

To optimize character education in early childhood through the role of parents can be done by providing leisure time. From the 10 families studied, only 6 families really took the time to accompany their children. From the results of interviews conducted with 4 families who have limited free time, it can be seen that their parents are busy working in the fields or in the garden all day to meet family needs. The average family has limited time with children because of their profession as agricultural laborers who work on other people's land (coolies) and get wages according to the agreement with the landlord. So some parents who cannot pay attention and share their time with the family, almost all of their time is spent on outside activities, because of economic activities. Meanwhile, for families who cultivate their own land, parents have enough time to manage time between work and accompanying their children.

Though according (Ciboci et al., 2014) to optimize character education for children who are still at an early age, parents' free time to be beside their children at any time cannot be underestimated. Leisure time is very important, because basically early childhood needs more assistance from their parents. Because children at an early age are just starting to learn about the values of life (Ciboci et al., 2014). So they must get intensive guidance from their parents. This guidance certainly directs children to always choose and sort out, which attitudes or

actions are right or wrong. The long-term goal is for children to have a firm grasp of right and wrong from an early age. The character values will be internalized unconsciously and ingrained in the character (Nabiyevna, 2023).

Based on the results of the observations that the researchers made, the free time of the parents in the 6 families for their children was realized by reading their children story books or inviting them to watch television while giving comments related to the character values contained in stories and films. Apart from that, free time is used to play with children, gardening behind the house, cleaning in the room, and cooking together. The things that are done together, of course, provide optimal development for the formation of children's character.

The purpose of parents providing free time is actually to build and develop emotional bonds. Family, especially parents also have a very important role in the development of children's character. With enough free time, of course, children will get all the needs they need to develop their character properly (Eysenck, 1979). Through a lot of free time, parents have an optimal role in raising and caring for children with great affection for children. Children will also feel needed and cared for in the family and communication between the child's parents will be well established. With a lot of time between parents and children that will create a sense of comfort, peace, so that children can easily explore behavior according to the character instilled by parents (Prayogo et al., 2021).

The emotional bond that is formed because of togetherness, will make it easier for parents to educate their children (Paquette, 2004). The ability of parents to educate their children will be born in the form of an authority that is slowly recognized and obeyed. It is in the family that the behavior and character of a child is formed through the authority of the parents in accordance with the norms and values prevailing in society (Mulyati et al., 2020). In the long term, a character will appear who obeys orders or advice from parents. Children are also easier to direct. Unlike the case when from childhood the inner relationship between parents and children is distant. So that children tend to display or not recognize their authority (Horvat et al., 2003). All directions are often not obeyed and there is a tendency for resistance to emerge as a form of child dissatisfaction with their parents.

The role of parents in optimizing children's character education at an early age can be done with advice. Giving wise advice is one way for parents to play a role in educating their children (Lisa, 2011). Through the advice of their parents, children will get new and valuable lessons that are useful for their future lives. Based on field observations, it was found that out of the 10 families studied, 8 families applied advice as a way for parents to optimize their children's character education. As for the 2 families, the advice did not really affect the optimization of their children's character education.

To optimize children's character education at an early age, parents must provide educational advice to their children. Given that giving advice has an important role as a foundation for fortifying the character of children from something that can plunge them into bad behaviors (Etemad & Turner, 2008). No matter how busy parents are, it is hoped that they can still set aside time to educate the character of their children through advice.

Because based on research conducted by (Sutrisno, 2017), that the method of education by giving advice, children will be influenced by words that give instructions, advice that gives guidance, effective stories, interesting dialogues, wise methods and directives that leave an impression. Without this, the child's feelings will not move, his heart and emotions will not move, so that education will become dry, and there is little hope of improving it.

Based on the results of interviews conducted, that parents try to give advice to their children when they have made mistakes. With that advice, his children will try to understand and correct their mistakes. However, on other occasions it seems that parents give advice to their children, even though they have done nothing wrong. According to the parents, this was done to equip their children with good character values, so as to prevent them from falling into mistakes. Uniquely in giving advice to their children, every parent has a different way,

such as through fairy tales or television films. This is done by parents because they see the characteristics of their own children. In general, to be able to do that, parents must often see the behavior of their child on a regular basis.

The results of the interviews and observations imply how important the advice given by parents is. It can be said, that advice is very meaningful and useful for a child's life, because with that advice, children can grow into better individuals in the future. Therefore, giving advice has many benefits (Miller et al., 2015). Interestingly, this research shows that the advice given by parents to their children is not related to the academic field. Instead, it is more focused on changing children's attitudes and behavior, especially when interacting with other people.

The role of parents in optimizing character education in early childhood can be done by providing motivation to children. The role of parents in optimizing the formation of a child's personality is to provide support and motivation (Miller et al., 2015). Parents who want their children to achieve their goals for success, then encourage and motivate them. However, out of the 10 families studied, only 6 families motivated their children in an effort to optimize character education in the family environment.

Based on the results of observations made by researchers, the forms of motivation given by parents to children are different. But in general it is seen in the field, that the forms of motivation given by parents to their children, such as gifts, praise and gestures. In more detail, the form of motivation given by parents in optimizing character education in early childhood and families that apply it can be seen in the table 1.

Table 1 Forms of motivation and the families that chose them

No	The Form of Motivation	Family
1.	Gifts	4 Families
2.	Praise	2 Families
3.	Gestures	1 Family

Gifts are the form of motivation most often chosen by families to reward their children. From the 7 families who agreed with the motivation in optimizing character education in the family environment, 4 families chose gifts as the way. Based on the results of interviews with parents, that motivation is seen as the most effective method for educating their children. Gifts are the best way for parents to appreciate their children (Geller & Sumner, 1997). Through gifts, parents seem to be telling their children that they are involved and witness how difficult their child's struggle is. Children will also feel that both parents really appreciate all their efforts (Yee, 2006).

Based on the researchers' observations, gifts were given by parents for several reasons, such as making their bed and toys, following or obeying their parents' words, not crying, and not disturbing their parents when they were on the move. On average, the gifts that parents give to their children, such as snacks, ice cream, toys and taking them for a walk or vacation, even though they are not too far from home.

Another form of motivation used by parents to optimize character education is praise. From this research, it can be seen that 2 families use praise as a motivation to cultivate good character towards their children. Based on the results of interviews with parents, it can be seen why they give praise as motivation, namely so that children can find out what attitudes and behaviors are liked by their parents, so that children also tend to do the same actions or continue to repeat them. In addition, parents also believe that everyone, including children, wants to be praised.

Based on the observations of researchers, the praise given to children shows how proud the parents are. Parents enthusiastically praise their child's attitude and behavior. Children are very happy to get praise from their parents.

Giving praise is the right step to form a good personality in children (Lee et al., 2017). Compliment is defined as a speech that can be flattered, and can provide motivation to the person being praised (Eyberg S. & Robinson E., 1982). In this research, parents often respond to good behavior shown by children because they judge that it is appropriate for children to behave like that. Because naturally the good behavior shown by children in everyday life also needs to be responded positively by parents. Because the response that parents convey can help children develop self-confidence and children's respect for themselves. Some of the parents' praise found in this research, such as diligent child, smart child, polite child, great father's child and good mother's child.

The form of praise that is least used by families to motivate children in order to optimize their character education in the family environment is with gestures. From 7 families who viewed motivation as important, only 1 family chose gestures as a form of motivation in educating their children's character. From the results of observations of researchers in the field, motivation with gestures from parents to children is carried out through giving thumbs up, smiling, sharp eyes indicating approval, nodding the head.

The role of parents in optimizing character education in early childhood in the family environment can be done using the habituation method. Habituation is basically a continuous process for children to carry out in the form of behavior, mindset, skills and so on (Syarifah et al., 2021). In general, children's habits are formed from repeated actions. Judging from the process, the actions taken were initially conscious or intentional, but because so often the same action is carried out, in the end a habit becomes a reflex that is no longer realized by the child (Sujarwo et al., 2021).

Especially in early childhood belonging to the age of 0-6 years. Where at that age they have a greater sense of curiosity, always imitate what they see and children are still groping about which ones are good and which ones are not good, therefore habits are needed to develop good character. Habituation is one method of education that is very important, especially for children. They do not understand what is good and bad in the true sense. They also do not have obligations that must be done like adults. So, need to get used to something good. In the end, they will turn all their good qualities into habits (Ulumuddini, 2008).

Through the results of interviews with 10 families, it can be seen that 10 families apply the habituation method in optimizing character education for their children who are at an early age. According to parents, this method is quite effective for their children who are still at an early age. Because at this age, children have a strong memory and immature personality conditions, so it's easier to set up to do a habit.

Based on the researchers' observations, some character values are habituated through the role of parents in their children, such as instilling the value of honesty by always getting in the habit of returning money after shopping, getting used to children always helping their parents (mopping, washing, sweeping), getting children used to getting up early, get used to children to take a bath on time, get used to children to eat food at home, get used to children to tidy up their toys, get used to children to make their bed, and other habits that they can do.

Based on the results of interviews with parents, by doing this habituation it is hoped that it can make children have new attitudes and habits that are more positive and in accordance with applicable norms or morals. The existence of habituation at home is to train and familiarize early childhood to be consistent with the aim of having good and positive habits instilled in them, so that it is very difficult to leave (Daun, 2011). Then the good habits that children see and hear when they are small will be firmly ingrained and rooted in the child's mind and will become good habits in the future (Li, 2013).

The role of parents in optimizing character education in early childhood can be done by applying punishment. Punishment in discipline is indeed necessary so that children are more disciplined (Noguera, 2003). This means that in today's life parents must educate their children firmly, but not with violence (Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Based on the results of interviews

conducted with several parents, the forms of punishment given to early childhood in optimizing character education are seen in the table 2.

Table 2. Forms of punishment and families that use them

No.	The Form of Punishment	Family
1.	Keeping their children silent	5 Families
2.	Giving children additional household chores	3 Families
3.	Temporarily prohibit the child from doing her/his favorite activity	2 Families

From the results of these interviews it can be seen that temporarily keeping silent (not asking him to talk) or giving children time alone to reflect on their mistakes is the form of punishment most families choose. From 10 families studied, there were 5 families who used this punishment if their children made mistakes. This punishment is given with the intention of forming a child's character so that she/he is able to introspect herself/himself on her/his mistakes. After really realizing the mistake she/he made, then the parents invite the child to have a heart-to-heart talk about the mistake and the consequences that might result. At the end of the conversation, the parents then ask the child's commitment or sincerity whether they want to change and will not repeat the action.

Apart from keeping their children silent, 3 other families prefer to punish their children by giving them additional household chores. By giving additional tasks, the child's awareness of the mistakes she/he is making will be faster. Based on the results of the interviews conducted, the additional housework given revolved around light things to do, such as sweeping his room, washing dirty glasses and dishes, making her/his bed and toys.

Another punishment given when a child makes a mistake is to temporarily prohibit the child from doing her/his favorite activity. Based on the observations made by the researchers, it can be seen that there are 2 families who use this form of punishment to discipline their children. Some things that are usually forbidden by parents to punish their children when they make mistakes, such as forbidding watching television or playing.

Conclusion

Based on the results and discussion above, this research reached the conclusion stage, that the Strategic Role of Parents in Optimizing Character Education in Early Childhood in the Family Environment was carried out using various methods. The results of this research indicated that exemplary, providing leisure time, advice, motivation, habituation and punishment were the main roles played by parents in an effort to optimize the character education of their children. Thus, parents have a strategic role in optimizing character education in early childhood.

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